

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 11, 2005

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

We write to express our appreciation for the Department of State's 2004 designation of Saudi Arabia as a "country of particular concern" (CPC) for its systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, and to express our wish to see the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia defined more clearly.

We are seriously troubled by a series of recent events that evidence Saudi Arabia's support for religious ideologies that promote hatred, intolerance and violence around the world, and its severe restrictions on religious freedom and social equality within its own borders. Recently, Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom released a disquieting report revealing the existence of vast amounts of Saudi government publications on the ideology of hate in America. Freedom House gathered samples of over 200 books and other publications from American mosques that preach a "Nazi-like hatred for Jews" and "promote contempt for the United States because it is ruled by legislated civil law rather than by totalitarian Wahhabi-style Islamic law." One such document, distributed through the Saudi Arabian Embassy's Cultural Department in Washington, D.C., is a fatwa against the taking of American citizenship by Muslims and thereby "acquiescing to their infidelity and accepting all their erroneous ways." The report explicitly concludes that Saudi Arabia is the state most responsible for the propagation of these publications within our borders, and that these publications are often official publications of a Saudi ministry or distributed by the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, D.C. to mosques and Islamic centers in American cities.

We are deeply concerned that these materials could breed intolerance and hatred in newly arrived Muslim immigrants who make their local mosque the centerpiece of their community experience. We urge you to persuade the Saudi Arabian government to work with the United States in curtailing their distribution. Further, we would like to see specific actions taken to condemn and curtail Saudi Arabian support for extremist ideology, promote equality and reform within Saudi Arabia, and to clearly outline a broad based foreign policy strategy that will support these goals.

We also urge you to utilize Saudi Arabia's designation as a violator of religious freedom to respond decisively to Saudi support for extremist religious ideologies. Last year, Congress expressed its desire for the President to negotiate a binding agreement with the government of Saudi Arabia to cease any programs that contribute to severe violations of religious freedom.

We support the implementation of several measures, recommended to you in writing by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, which could be implemented in response to Saudi Arabia's CPC designation. These recommendations include identifying Saudi agencies and officials responsible for violations of religious freedom, issuing a proclamation barring Saudi officials who propagate hateful and intolerant ideology from entering the U.S., issuing a demarche urging the government of Saudi Arabia to cease support for activities throughout the world that explicitly promote hate and human rights violations, and ordering the heads of U.S. agencies not to issue licenses or authorities for the export of items on the Commerce Control List of dual-use items to an agency or instrument of the government of Saudi Arabia that is responsible for committing particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

While we are indeed pleased that municipal elections recently took place in Saudi Arabia for the first time in four decades, we are deeply disturbed by the exclusion of women from all aspects of these elections. Religious law in Saudi Arabia is interpreted and enforced in a manner that affects every aspect of the lives of Saudi women and results in serious violations of their human rights. The government of Saudi Arabia severely limits the freedom of movement of women and discriminates against women in education, employment, access to healthcare, marriage, and inheritance. Therefore, we urge you to seize every opportunity to raise concerns at the highest levels with the government of Saudi Arabia regarding the ongoing and repeated violations of internationally recognized human rights and to develop specific initiatives to advance human rights, including the rights of women, religious freedom, and the rule of law.

In President Bush's State of the Union address, he stated that "the peace we seek will only be achieved by eliminating the conditions that feed radicalism and ideologies of murder." Yet, Saudi Arabia, a nation that professes to be an ally in this war, continues to openly support religious extremism throughout the world. Saudi Arabia's efforts to export militant Wahhabi ideology throughout the world inflame the type of anti-American sentiments that lie behind the potential of terrorist attacks that continue to be the greatest threat to our national security. Therefore, it is essential that Saudi Arabia be held accountable for its support of radical Islamic ideology.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



